



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
URBAN FORESTRY COMMITTEE
JOSEPH A. CURTATONE
MAYOR

Urban Forestry Committee Meeting
SEPTEMBER 16, 2021 4:30PM
MINUTES

Due to COVID-19 virus containment efforts, this meeting was held remotely.

A recording of the meeting can be accessed here:

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/recording/5998357515776694287>

Meeting notes prepared by Jennifer Clifford and Vanessa Boukili

Committee Members in attendance: Chris Dwan (Co-Chair), Althea Northcross (Co-Chair), Tori Antonino, Jennifer Clifford, Amy Mertl, Leah Grossman, Vanessa Boukili (Senior Urban Forestry and Landscape Planner), Malik Drayton (Tree Warden designee)

Committee Members absent: Conor Guidarelli

Others in Attendance: Melissa Woods

Call to Order: Dwan called meeting to order at 4:32 pm

1. Introductions / Housekeeping

- a) Introductions all around.

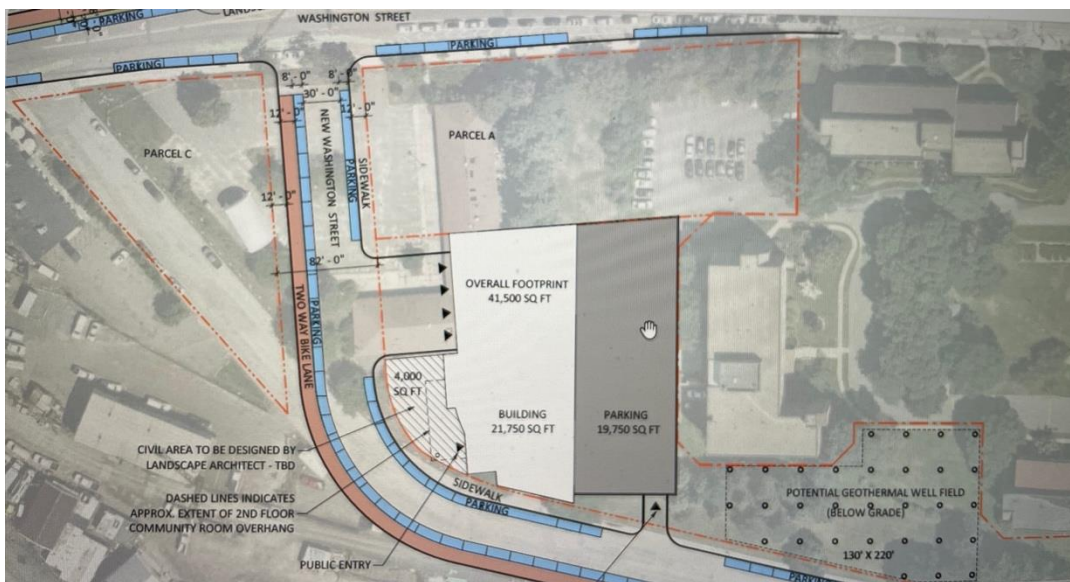
2. Resident Concerns

- a) Antonino: Stone Place Park concern: not hitting mark of 70% native species planted
 - i. Boukili: Species list from Grounds Department as follows: Shrubs: 3 non-native dogwoods, 8 non-native hydrangeas, 5 non-native rhodenendrons, 3 native mountain laurels, 34 native phlox planted (some were eaten by rabbits). PSUF also planted 5 native trees in parks this Spring.
 - ii. Dwan: perhaps a gap in Native Plant Ordinance (a plant is a plant)
 - iii. Antonino concurs: 1 phlox and 1 rhododendron don't have same ecosystem value. The Native Plant Ordinance needs work to define.
 - iv. Boukili: this is a learning curve and DPW doing best to comply; need to work out the tweaks of intent in following the ordinance.

- b) Boukili: Feedback on recently released UFMP. Generally very positive, but there was one email from someone disappointed that pollen and allergens were not discussed in the plan. Concern of effect of climate change on pollen production. This needs to be investigated further. Some species have pollen that is worse for allergies (i.e., oaks). Benefits of oaks outweigh detriment of pollen in affecting people with allergies. Unnatural sex balance of trees in cities was brought up, but this is not really a problem in Somerville (some gingko, honeylocust). Some individuals may be higher producers of pollen in city vs a more natural habitat.
- c) Antonino: tree warden position was posted. What does this mean?
 - i. Boukili: this is a new position and will be a full-time tree warden as opposed to being attached to 'lights and lines'. Trees will be the only responsibility. Tree crew will likely report to tree warden, although union discussions are ongoing.
- d) Mertl: relay of resident comment: Does Somerville have carbon credits where a company can plant a tree to get carbon credits. Company partnerships?
 - i. Boukili: no program exists, but has seen this elsewhere and is interested. Need to know how to get started.

3. Updates from City

- a) 90 Washington Street project – presentation from Melissa Woods (Capital Projects), and discussion:
 - i. Woods - Land for project acquired by City 2 years ago; it is the Former Cobble Hill strip mall site (Washington and New Washington Streets). The area will be realigned to accommodate a public safety complex (Parcel B; see image).



Construction will start summer 2022. Complex provides community benefits: new police station, engine 3, community room for neighborhood to fit predicted community population, front yard as public plaza, “tail portion” as public open space. Current plan

has not been vetted (i.e. by PSUF), but showing for illustrative purposes. Plan is to include trees and other plants along new Washington St and the back public park. The site is also expected to achieve net zero goals.

Currently there are mature trees on site, mostly pine trees. Early site package will enable site construction (incl. remediation of soil) with ~30 trees removed. Working to get contractor on board. Maybe tree removal in “tail” portion can be delayed until ready for geothermal to be installed. Plan for a public meeting in October (date TBD) to share design and other news, status of early site package.

b) Discussion

- i. Dwan: What is intent of public meeting? Timeline? When will this begin? There will be concerns of Cobble Hill residents that trees are being removed.
 1. Woods: Intent of public meeting is to provide/share info (schedule, site enabling) and getting feedback on plaza. Current plan is a placeholder only for pricing purposes. Project will begin at the end of 2021 and take approximately 2 years. Removing trees from right-of-way, and from site B. Work on the tail portion will be delayed until closer to actually construction.
- ii. Boukili: Leave trees as long as possible. The 30 trees mentioned for removal soon does not include future tree removals on the tail portion? Woods confirms.
- iii. Grossman: What are site A and site C plans? What are plans for old road when it is moved?
 1. Woods: site A and C managed by economic development and they will hold a process. New Washington St will stay functional through construction and won't be closed until new portion is ready. Intent is to incorporate New Washington St into site C.
- iv. Mertl: can you provide species and size of trees that we are losing? Dwan: this is effective and important for replacement plans and to give assurance to community. Grossman: it is UFC priority to save as many trees as possible.
 1. Woods: agrees; advice from consultants allows for tree preservation at some area of the site. As far as site selection, can't plant trees on geothermal site and need to be careful of selected species (no taproot)
- v. Grossman: do we have space to start trees growing on or close to site? Would timeline be amenable for young trees to live on site until construction happens (or something similar). Option to plant young trees early and allow them to develop and they can be moved later. In other words, can use this area as a small nursery?
 1. Woods: would like to learn more
- vi. Northcross: relays experience with working with engineers to create underground chambers for water infiltration and underground fields. Perhaps 5-7' offset from property

line could potentially save a row of trees on back of lot, depending on restraints and flexibility of plan of grid. We should have these conversations.

1. Dwan: concurs; also, get budgetary number, what will the cost be? Again, if we remove trees, can we know why and what the cost saving could be so that we can explain to concerned residents if needed.
- vii. Grossman: what is history of site and potential remediation impacts? Important because trees at some proximity to toxic soils are themselves toxic.
 1. Woods: site does have some contamination but typical of urban soils; will dig into reports about the remediation work.
- viii. Antonino: expresses concern that this seems sudden. Are there exceptions for city owned buildings?
 1. Woods: assures that this is only at second phase and is still in development. City projects are exempt from code when in the district, but planners are taking this seriously. Input is by the area where it is located and the community that will be impacted.
- ix. Antonino: why no parking underground? Can there be a roof garden?
 1. Woods: water table too high, cannot have underground parking; solar panels may impact capacity for roof garden.

c) City Tree Removals

- i. Boukili: nothing new scheduled, stump removals ongoing.
 1. Dwan: understaffing of DPW. In future: what is the schedule and restraints on removing trees, stumps, and repairing the sidewalk (could make a timeline or flowchart).
 2. Boukili: large stumps can fall off radar, Call 311 for stump removal request. In some cases delays can happen equipment is getting repaired.
- ii. Boukili: Tree hearing is coming up for development projects: Middlesex Ave and Boynton Yards.

d) Private Tree Removal Permit(s) and Exception(s) – refer to shared list

- i. Drayton reported on various permits and exemptions issued. These are recorded and available upon request. To date, 39 permits have been issued (some are redundant applications) and City has received ~\$50,000 in payments to Tree Fund.

e) City Tree Planting

- i. Boukili: fall planting: 270 trees (most we have ever planted in one season). Need to finalize species choices – sent list to UFC. Sites are marked with a “T” and well edges have dots.
 1. Dwan: Cambridge has stickers; can we do something like this?

- a. Boukili: love idea. As alternative, for the last two planting seasons we have delivering letters to abutters to let people know tree is coming. This is going well and allows for feedback from residents.
2. Dwan: how have we gotten to be able to plant more trees?
 - a. Boukili: Started earlier, as we want to make sure we meet UFMP goal and we are making up for fewer planted in spring.
3. Antonino: Are contractors looking for species outside of Tuckahoe?
 - a. Boukili: We are working toward the 50% native proportion. Somewhat dependent on what species the contractors can find. Note that this contract was in place prior to passage of NPO. Many preferred native species are fall dig hazards: these tend to die if you dig them in fall season and so should be planted in spring.
 - b. Grossman: is this still the case with trees grown above ground and covered in mulch? Can we support the search (calling nurseries or planting)?
 - c. Boukili: pre-dug trees should be fine. Maybe we can maybe get some that way. For now, it is the contractor responsibility to find what we ask for.
4. Antonino: no golden raintree (invasive in southern and midwestern states). Suggest (if not a fall hazard): sassafrass, red buckeye, sweet bay magnolia, pawpaw (male), basswood, American smoketree, straight species choke cherry (these are on recommended species list), dogwood for streets (not just parks), eastern redbud, sourwood.
 - a. Boukili: Dogwood and smoketree have low branches, not good for street trees.
 - b. Dwan: low branches are a problem for mobility issues and high traffic areas, branches get broken.

4. Ongoing Work Updates

- a) Arbor Day
 - i. Adopt-a-Tree program
 1. Northcross: will set up a working group meeting to go over the 2021 season.
 2. Mertl shared a story about a very diligent tree adopter and this is really good to hear!
- b) ROOT collaboration
 - i. Northcross: Banner is being moved to Lincoln Park; will set up a working group meeting to discuss next steps.
- c) SomerStreets Tabling

- i. Clifford: Sunday, 9/19/21 from 2-6 p.m. with Northcross, Mertl, Antonino. Items from Arbor Day celebration along with some additional outreach flyers and signs. Raffle is possible (pollinator plants, seeds, etc).
- ii. Antonino voice concern over the Asian jumping worm in soil/compost (for use with seed bombs).

d) Outreach

- i. Clifford shared and discussed yard signs created with Mertl, Renee Scott, including 'Protect the Trees' (do not lock bikes, attach signs or break branches) and 'Natural habitat in Progress (leave the leaves and do not mow) designed for locating around the city. Ideally would like to get these out this fall.
 - 1. Boukili: DPW is agreeable to a few locations for the natural habitat in progress. Details TBD.
- ii. Discussion of wording that accurately reflects the attachment to trees (nailing, stapling, taping, etc). 'Place' or Attach' encompasses each action.

e) Tree Species Selection and Planting Standards

- i. Working group will be meeting soon and provide more updates next time.
- ii. Antonino: tree well experiment could maybe be a smaller project, i.e., using ground cover as this could be easier to organize. Will provide overview soon.

5. Approval of Minutes from Previous Meetings

- a) August 19th, 2021
- b) Amended to update tree removal permit language (ensuring number of permits matches).
 - i. Boukili suggests cutting out specific addresses and including the number issued along with the number issued to date Ditto for funds received.
- c) **Call to vote to approve meeting minutes as amended:**
 - i. Yay: Northcross, Mertl, Dwan, Clifford, Grossman, Drayton, Boukili, Antonino
 - ii. Nay: none
 - iii. Abstain: none

6. **Adjourn:** Motion to adjourn meeting unanimously approved at 6:29 pm [motion - Drayton, second – Grossman, vote: 8:0:0]